
A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

Primary Visitation

Of his GRACE

LANCELOT Lord Archbishop of York.

Notes

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Printed at the

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LANCELOT Lord Archbishop of York,

HELD AT

M A N S F I E L D,

On Tuesday, Aug. 9. 1726.

By EDWARD WILSON, M. A. Rector of
Teveral in *Nottinghamshire*.

Publish'd by his GRACE's special Command, and
at the Request of several of the Clergy.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. OSBORN and T. LONGMAN,
in *Pater-noster-Row*, and W. WARD, Book-
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On the 17th



By EDWARD WILLIAMS, M. A. Rector of
Trinity in Nottingham

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2 Cor. vi. 3, 4.

*Giving no Offence in any thing, that
the Ministry be not blamed.*

*But in all things approving our
selves as the Ministers of God.*

THIS Epistle of St. *Paul* seems principally intended to re-establish his Character and Authority among the *Corinthians*, who had been seduc'd by false Teachers during his Absence ; and to vindicate himself from the Aspersions, which these had cast upon his Person and Doctrine : For this purpose we may observe he insists chiefly on *three Things*.

First, THE extraordinary Signs of his Apostleship, which he produc'd among them, by working of Miracles, in Confirmation of the Doctrine he preached.

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Secondly,

Secondly, H I S Courage and Constancy under frequent Sufferings, for the Cause of Christ. And,

Thirdly, T H E Sincerity and Prudence of his Conduct in the Discharge of his Office.

T H E S E, together with the Excellency of that Doctrine which he publish'd, were most undeniable Testimonies of his divine Mission; and evidently shew'd, that he was a Person every way qualify'd for the great Work assign'd to him: and that the Success of his Ministry was, in a great measure, answerable to his Qualifications for it, appears, from that grateful Acknowledgment which he makes at the fourteenth Verse of the second Chapter; where he says, *Thanks be to God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the Savour of his Knowledge by us in every place.*

Now this Representation which the Apostle here makes of himself, (wherein are likewise included his Fellow-Labourers in the Gospel) tho it be occasional, and drawn up with a View to the particular State and Disposition of the Church at
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Corinth; yet is it of this general Use, That all those, who by the Providence of God, are appointed for the Work of the Ministry, may thence take proper Measures for the more successful Discharge of their Office.

THAT Religion we are employ'd to establish and cultivate in the Minds of Men, is, or ought to be, the same which Christ and his Apostles first publish'd to the World; and therefore must have the same Characters of Excellency and Perfection to recommend it.

THE Foundations of it were indeed securely laid by the Apostles themselves, and the Work, in a few Years after their Decease, was carried on to Perfection by their more immediate Successors: so that the Power of working Miracles in Confirmation of Christianity became extinct, as being no longer necessary for that purpose; and therefore this part of the Apostolick Character can be no Rule for our Imitation or Practice.

So likewise, since it has pleas'd God, in his Goodness, to grant us a quiet and undisturb'd Profession of our most holy Religion; since the Ministers of the Gospel

are so far from being persecuted or hinder'd in the Exercise of their Function, that they are encourag'd and protected by human Laws; nay, requir'd to be diligent in the Discharge of their Duty: I say, since the Condition of Christianity is so much changed, the Apostle's Example, as it relates to his Sufferings for the Cause of Christ, does not, at present (blessed be God!) so immediately concern us.

WHENEVER indeed his Wisdom shall think fit to interrupt our Peace and Prosperity, and for the Trial of our Faith and Patience, or for the Punishment of our Sins, shall expose our Religion to the Power and Malice of cruel and bloody-minded Men; then the heroick Courage and unshaken Constancy of our Apostle, will be an admirable Rule for our Conduct: But in the mean while, under the present happy and peaceable Enjoyment of our Religion, his Example in this Particular, needs no Enforcement on our Practice.

BUT then, as for the remaining part of his Vindication, which relates to the Sincerity and Prudence of his Conduct in the Work of the Ministry, this is of universal Concern to us: 'Tis an Example, not suited to the particular Occasions and Exigencies
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of Christ's Church, but such as at all Times, and in all Places, will be necessary to be observ'd and copied by us: and to encourage our Imitation of it, we may consider it, not so much the Example of an Apostle of Christ, that is, of a Person immediately commission'd from Heaven, and in an extraordinary manner conducted by a divine Power and Assistance; but as the Example of a wise and good Man, acting under the ordinary Influence of God's holy Spirit, and according to the Rules of human Prudence, making choice of the properest Means to accomplish the End and Design of his Ministry. Under this View, it may appear more particularly adapted to the Condition and Circumstances of the ordinary Pastors of Christ's Church; and such, as with due Care, may in a great measure be copied by them.

Now the Account we have of the Apostle's Conduct in this Particular, lies indeed dispers'd among all his Writings; yet as the Design of this Epistle oblig'd him to insist upon what was so necessary for his own Vindication, so here perhaps we meet with more frequent Passages of this kind. Thus at the twelfth Verse of the first Chapter, he says, *Our Rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity*

plicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we have had our Conversation in the World. And again, at the seventeenth Verse of the next Chapter, For we are not as many, which corrupt the Word of God, but as of Sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. So again, at the beginning of the fourth Chapter, Therefore seeing we have this Ministry, as we have received Mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden Things of Dishonesty, not walking in Craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the Truth, commending our selves to every Man's Conscience in the sight of God. But the full Intent and Meaning of these, and all other Passages which relate to this Head, may be comprehended in that Account which we have in the Words of my Text, Giving no Offence in any thing, that the Ministry be not blamed; but in all things approving our selves as the Ministers of God.

FROM these Words I shall beg leave to observe a few Things, which I hope will not be improper, or unseasonable, at this Time.

AND,

AND, *first*, I think it is evidently imply'd in the Text, that it is highly expedient for the Interests of Religion that the Credit of the Ministry be supported: for the only Purpose and Design in the original Institution of it, being to propagate and establish the great Truths of Christianity, the Credit of the Ministry is no otherwise to be regarded, than as it is necessary for the more successful carrying on of this great and good Work; so that if the Apostle was himself exceeding careful in this Particular, and by his Example has recommended the same Caution to others, it must be upon this Persuasion, that the Interests of Religion are affected by it. And that the Case is really so, is abundantly confirm'd by Experience, tho perhaps it will not be very easy to assign any good Reason for it.

FOR why a Religion that has the strongest Evidence to confirm it, and the most engaging Properties to recommend it to the Practice of Mankind; I say, why such a Religion should suffer in the Opinions of Men, by the Negligence, or Indiscretion of the Ministers of it; is neither agreeable to Reason, nor the ordinary Practice of Men in other Cases: 'Tis judging by Things that are foreign and extrinsic to the
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matter in question ; 'tis a confus'd joining of Ideas that have no immediate Relation and Dependance on each other, which is allow'd to be contrary to the Rules of strict Reasoning. And further, I say, it is a Method very seldom us'd in other Cases : For let a new System of Philosophy, or an Attempt to demonstrate the Principles of any Art or Science, be refer'd to the Examination of the Publick ; the Enquiry is not how the Author lives, but how he reasons : So usually in matters of Practice, which relate only to the Concerns of this World, Men come into those Schemes which appear to be best founded in Reason and Experience, without any regard to the personal Conduct of the Publishers and Encouragers of them.

BUT the plain truth is, such Matters of Speculation, or Practice, either concur, or else do not interfere with the Lusts and Passions of Men : They may live undisturb'd in their Sins, under the strongest Convictions of that kind. But that a Religion should be true, which obliges them to mortify their Lusts, and to curb their Passions ; to discard every Vice, and to practise every Virtue ; this so directly attacks their sinful Pleasures, that every thing is examin'd and alledg'd in Abatement of
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its Credit, or of their Obligations to practise it : Every little Difficulty is made a *Stone of Stumbling*, and easily improv'd into a mighty *Rock of Offence*. And if the Religion it self be unexceptionable, yet shall the Indiscretions and Failings of its Ministers be urg'd as Arguments against it : A way of Reasoning that has no force but what it receives from the Passions and Prejudices of Men.

YET if the Case be really so ; if thro' the Blindness and Infirmities of human Nature, Men are so liable to be deceiv'd, or rather to impose on themselves ; how necessary is it that all Objections of this kind should be remov'd, that the Credit of the Ministry should be preserv'd, and *no Occasion* given to those who may *desire Occasion* to think, or speak contemptuously of us, or of our Ministry ?

MORE especially is this to be consider'd with regard to the more ignorant part of Mankind, who perhaps have neither Leisure, nor Abilities to enter far into the Reasons of their Faith ; but believe and practise more from Authority, than a rational Conviction : If such are offended at Religion, by the ill Behaviour of those who are employ'd to instruct them in it, 'tis no

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more than may reasonably be expected ; because, let the Arguments and Motives offer'd to them be ever so weighty in their own Nature, yet if they do not affect those who are suppos'd to understand best the Force of them, they have too much room to suspect there is some secret Fallacy and Defect in them : Or however, since Example is more suited to their Capacities than Argument, they are more likely to form their Practice by what they see, than by what they hear.

'Tis not therefore sufficient that we have the best Religion, and are able to prove it by the most convincing Arguments ; but it is likewise necessary that a real Esteem and Value for our Ministry should be establish'd in the Minds of Men : That those who are able to weigh and examine the Evidences of Things, may have no Objections to Religion upon our Account : and that others may be led to the Practice of it, by the Influence of a good Example.

Now I observe, *secondly*, from the Words of my Text, that that Credit and Esteem for the Ministry, which is so necessary to prevent Objections, and to enforce the Practice of Religion, depends chiefly

chiefly on the personal Conduct of those who are employ'd therein.

FOR tho the Ministry, as it denotes that Method establish'd in the Church of Christ, of dispensing its Doctrines and Sacraments, by an Order of Men appointed for that purpose: I say, tho the Ministry, thus consider'd, is a distinct thing, and ought not to suffer any Discredit from the ill Execution of it; yet I am apt to think this Distinction is seldom made, and that the Credit of the Ministry and Ministers usually stand and fall together. And indeed were the Distinction duly made, the one is only a Term of Office, an abstracted Notion, of no farther use to Religion, than as it is rightly executed by the other: so that the Credit of those who are employ'd in the Ministry, is, for all the Purposes of Religion, the chief thing to be regarded.

Now the Esteem and Respect which the Ministers of the Gospel have more particular occasion for, as being a means of rendring their Labours more successful: I say, this Esteem and Respect depends chiefly on their own personal Conduct: for Men do not usually love and

admire, without some kind of Merit or other ; and our Merit can be founded in nothing but our own Behaviour and Qualifications. Something there must be to recommend us to the good Opinion of others, or else we must expect to live without it : this is generally the Case of other Men ; and certainly we have no reason to look for a more favourable Treatment.

WE may, 'tis true, claim Respect by virtue of our Commission, and preach up the Excellency and Importance of it ; we may insist on the great Character we bear, and the Authority we are invested with : yet if we do not act according to that Commission, live up to that Character, and make a right Use of that Authority, I fear our Credit will not be answerable to the Occasions we have for it. We may observe, that Titles of Honour and Dignity are seldom much esteem'd, without something of Estate, Power, or Worth to support them : and I imagine the Case will prove much the same with regard to our Employment ; there must be something more than the bare Dignity and Importance of it, to procure the Regard and Esteem of Men. Wealth and Power alone may command
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outward Respect and Reverence, and be sufficient for all the Purposes of an external ceremonious Religion: but this is not that Esteem which the great Design and Intent of our Ministry requires. The Religion of the Gospel consists chiefly in inward Purity and Holiness; and this is what we are to cultivate in the Minds of Men, and the proper Qualification for this excellent End, is such personal Worth and Merit as may beget a real Esteem and Veneration; and this can arise from nothing but the Piety, Goodness and Prudence of our own Behaviour: so that, as I said, the Credit of the Ministry, that Credit which is serviceable to the Interests of true Religion, depends chiefly on the personal Conduct of those who are employ'd therein.

WHAT that Conduct ought to be, we learn from the Example which the great Apostle of the *Gentiles* has here set before us, *Giving no Offence in any thing, that the Ministry be not blamed; but in all things approving our selves as the Ministers of God.*

HERE is a most admirable Rule for our Behaviour in the Work of the Ministry, the Observance of which will most certainly

certainly recommend us to the Favour of God, and most likely to the Love and Esteem of all Men. It is indeed a general Rule, that requires Wisdom and Direction in the Application of it to particular Times, Persons and Places; yet is it of great use, as it will in all Emergencies put us upon one or other of these Enquiries, Whether the thing we propose to do, be likely to give Offence, or not? Or whether it be becoming, and worthy the Minister of God, or not? And were this always deliberately weigh'd and consider'd, there is no doubt but a common share of Prudence would preserve us from any considerable Mistakes or Omissions: I say, therefore, tho the Rule be general, yet will it be of excellent use, if we but duly attend to it.

You may observe, it consists of two Parts.

THE *First* is of a negative Kind, relating to that Care and Circumspection we ought to use, lest our Behaviour give any Offence to the World.

THE *Second* is positive, and relates to the actual Performance of those Duties,
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which the Nature and Design of our Office requires from us.

THE *First* we have in these Words, *Giving no Offence in any thing, that the Ministry be not blamed.* A most excellent and effectual Method for this purpose, were the Observance of it as easy as it is expedient. But it may be asked, how is it possible for the Ministers of Christ, who, tho employ'd in a Concern of the greatest Importance, have yet all the Passions and Infirmities of other Men; and besides this, have to deal with a *crooked and perverse Generation*, who are apt to take Offence at small Matters: I say, considering these things, how is it possible for the Ministers of Christ to be so circumspect in their Behaviour, as to give no Offence in any thing? Why, certainly, in the strict and literal Sense, it is impossible; neither does God expect it, nor ought Men to require it of us: But the Limitations herein imply'd are the same which the Apostle elsewhere mentions upon another Occasion, where he says, *If it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all Men*: So, as far as it is in their Power, as far as the Infirmities of human Nature will admit, the Ministers of
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the Gospel must avoid giving Offence in any thing.

I might add indeed a further Limitation, so far as it is consistent with their Duty ; for certain it is, there are some things which properly belong to the Ministerial Office, which are too often disagreeable and offensive to Men ; such as Advice, Exhortation, and Reproof : so likewise the bare insisting on their just and legal Rights, is oftentimes a very great and unpardonable Offence ; nay, even preaching the Gospel it self, may be an Offence to some Men. But the truth is, these, and things of the like nature, if manag'd with Prudence and Discretion, are not Offences given, but taken without Cause, and therefore do not properly belong to this Rule ; for what it obliges us to, is only such a prudent and circumspect Behaviour, as may give no just Cause for Blame and Censure.

AND this is enough to employ all our Care and Caution, for the ways whereby Offences may be given are innumerable ; the Circumstances of Things and Persons may be infinitely varied : so that it is impossible to have a System of Rules to
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walk by, that will suit every particular Case that may happen : some useful Maxims we may have to form our Conduct upon, but the Application of them to particular Occasions, depends altogether on our own Prudence and Discretion.

THO I conceive, this nice Discernment and good Understanding, which is so requisite to form an inoffensive Behaviour in general, concerns us rather as Men, than as Ministers of the Gospel, it being equally necessary to all other Persons, who would recommend themselves to the Love and Esteem of Men. Indeed, as the Success of our Ministry depends very much on the good Opinion which others have of us, it should be our particular Care and Study to give no Offence, even in any respect : But that Caution, which seems more properly to belong to our Function, relates, as I apprehend, to things of a more obvious Nature ; such as require rather Honesty and Integrity to secure us from them, than extraordinary Wisdom and Discretion. And these may be consider'd either with regard to our *Doctrine*, or our *Practice*.

THUS as to the *First* : Should we, who are commission'd and appointed to preach the Gospel, and to publish the

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Terms of Salvation therein declar'd: I say, should we, who act by a Commisſion thus limited, take upon us to teach any other Doctrine, than what is expreſſly contain'd therein, or evidently prov'd thereby; ſhould we teach thoſe things as neceſſary to Salvation, which the Goſpel has not declar'd to be neceſſary, our ſo doing would give juſt occaſion of Offence to all wiſe and good Men.

AGAIN, ſince the great Deſign of our Office and Miniſtry, is to inſtruct Men in the right way to Happineſs, and to promote the ſincere Practice of Religion and Virtue; ſhould we, by any unreaſonable Representation of our ſelves, and the Dignity of our Office, diſcover a greater Concern for our own Power and Authority, than for the Salvation of Mens Souls, this might juſtly expoſe us to Re- proach and Censure.

FURTHER, ſince we acknowledge the Chriſtian Religion to be moſt excellent in it ſelf, highly worthy of God, and directly tending to the Perfection of Human Nature; ſhould we repreſent this excellent Religion in any other View, by aſcribing to it any Doctrine which is repugnant to the Divine Attributes, by multiplying

tipling the positive Precepts of it, and exalting them above those Duties, which are of natural and eternal Obligation; should we advance such Notions as make the Salvation of Men precarious and uncertain, as depending on Punctilio's and Circumstances, not in their own Power either to prevent, or procure: should we, I say, by any such unadvised Methods spread a Cloud over the native Beauties of Christianity, how much less engaging must it appear to the Minds of Men? Or rather, in this discerning Age, how greatly will our Credit suffer thereby?

AND once more, should we so far overlook the great Design and Purpose of this holy Religion, which is to cultivate Peace on Earth, and Good-will among Men; to sweeten their Dispositions, and to lay the Foundation of that happy Temper, which is necessary for the Enjoyment of Heaven: I say, should we so far overlook this excellent Purpose of our Religion, as to make it the Subject of endless Contention and Debate; should we be more industrious to inculcate Matters of Speculation and Opinion, than the plain Truths of the Gospel, (which, I conceive, is the grand Occasion of Dis-

putes in Religion) should we thus behave our selves, no doubt but all sincere and well-dispos'd Christians will be offended at it.

INDEED, these are things which discredit us chiefly with the more judicious and thinking part of Mankind. But there is another part of our Conduct which lies open to the View and Examination of all Capacities ; and that is our *Practice*.

AND here, should the Minister of God, whose Business it is to raise the Affections of Men above this World, to direct their Endeavours towards the Attainment of an everlasting Inheritance in Heaven ; should he, who is to inculcate this Disposition, have no regard to it in his own Behaviour, but discover too great a Concern for the World, and be immoderately bent on heaping *Treasures upon Earth*, whilst he is advising others to *lay up Treasures in Heaven* ; this Inconsistence is so obvious, that every one must take notice of it, and either disregard his Doctrine or condemn his Practice.

AGAIN, should he be self-interested, proud, passionate, or revengeful ; should he be uncharitable, censorious, or ill-natur'd ;

tur'd ; these are Qualities unbecoming a Man, much more a Christian, but most of all a Teacher of Christianity ; because the Precepts of this holy Religion are directly oppos'd to these troublesome and unfociable Passions, and are chiefly intended to extirpate them out of the Minds of Men : so that nothing can be more exceptionable than to see them harbour'd and cherish'd in that Breast, which should inspire quite opposite Qualities into others.

So further, should we fail in our Office, as *Stewards of the Mysteries of God* ; should we neglect to dispense the Food of Life in due Season, *to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak*, to inform the ignorant and them that are out of the way, to reprove the wicked, and to encourage the good ; such Omissions would not fail to give Offence to all who are acquainted with the End and Design of our Ministry.

AGAIN, should we, who are employ'd for the Advancement of Christ's spiritual Kingdom, entangle and perplex our selves about Matters of Civil Government, and seem at any time more concern'd for the Support of our own Schemes, than for the

the Security of our Religion ; should we, who upon Occasions have boasted of the Loyalty of our Principles, express any Disaffection to our lawful Governors, or encourage it in others, and that when all our religious and civil Rights are inviolably secur'd to us ; nay, after having given the strongest Pledge of our Allegiance, should we not chearfully contribute our Endeavours and our Prayers for their Preservation and Welfare, they might justly be offended at us ; and the Discouragements that might be laid upon us in such a Case, ought not to be ascrib'd to their Severity, or Partiality, but to our own Indiscretion.

AND, *lastly*, since we are oblig'd, by the Trust repos'd in us, to advance the Interests of Religion by all prudent and reasonable Methods ; should we not sometimes consult the Humours of Men, and have regard to the prevailing Weaknesses and Prejudices of the Times ; should we not as well consider what is *expedient* as what is *lawful* for us, and, as there is Occasion, abridge our selves in the use of Things indifferent : I say, should we not use our Christian Liberty with greater Discretion and Reserve than other Men, our Behaviour, tho really innocent, will not always be free from Censure.

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As for notorious and flagrant Sins, 'tis a Case I am not willing to suppose; and I persuade my self there is no occasion for it.

AND I must beg leave to remind you, that what I have before mention'd is only a Supposition of Cases, which, I hope, are seldom to be found in our Practice: however, since they are what have been sometimes objected to us, and are of such a Nature as will generally give offence; 'twill be our Duty and Interest, and of good Service to Religion, to guard our selves from them.

Now the best Rule imaginable for this Purpose, and for a general inoffensive Behaviour, is what we have in the remaining part of my Text; *But in all things approving our selves as the Ministers of God.* And this is to be done, as I conceive,

FIRST, by the Excellency of our Doctrine: For since the Nature and Attributes of God are now so clearly reveal'd, it will be difficult to convince Men that we are truly his Ministers, unless our Doctrine be in all Respects agreeable to his divine

vine Perfections: 'Tis upon this account that the Christian Religion has so generally engag'd the Assent of all wise and reasonable Men ; because it not only represents God as the most wise and perfect Being, and gives the most sublime and exalted Ideas of his Nature ; but likewise enforces the Belief and Practice only of such Things as are entirely conformable to such Conceptions of him : Without this all the Miracles that were ever wrought in Confirmation of it, would prevail no further with discerning Men, than to leave them perhaps in a state of Doubt and Suspence : But having these internal Characters of Excellency and Perfection, confirm'd by the external Evidence of Miracles, We, who are Ministers of this holy Religion, have nothing more to do, than to teach it in the Purity and Simplicity of the Gospel. All Matters of Faith therein propos'd, all the Rules of Life thereby prescrib'd to Men, are so worthy of God, and so conducive to the Happiness and Perfection of our Nature, that we must needs approve ourselves his faithful Ministers, if we strictly confine ourselves to this Rule ; and most certain it is, we have no Commission to go beyond it.

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SECONDLY, To approve our selves as the Ministers of God, we must behave with great Uprightness and Integrity, as well in our general Conversation, as in the Exercise of our proper Function. For, as I apprehend, the Character here refer'd to denotes such Persons, as the Wisdom of God might be suppos'd to make choice of for the Work of the Ministry, did he think fit to interpose in the Nomination of them : And these certainly must be such, as in fact they were, when they were so extraordinarily appointed ; that is, Men of great Simplicity, Honesty, and Integrity ; such as have no private Views inconsistent with the general Design of their Office ; no Schemes of Self-interest or Ambition to advance ; and comparatively, no Designs, but faithfully to discharge the Trust committed to them : They must be such as are persuaded themselves of those Truths which they endeavour to inculcate, and such as are sincerely resolv'd to make their Advice and Instructions to others, the Rule and Measure of their own Practice. Such, I say, were those who were the Ministers of God in a more strict and emphatical Sense, as having receiv'd their Commission immediately from Him :

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They tell us, that *their Rejoycing was this, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity they had their Conversation in the World.* And if we would approve our selves as such, we must, as near as we are able, copy after their Example in this Particular.

AND this we shall find to be a very great Security from giving Offence : for tho Honesty and Integrity does not imply extraordinary Prudence, yet where it appears thro' our general Conversation, 'twill be almost sure to gain a candid and favourable Construction of what we do ; and so cut off many Occasions of Offence, which otherwise might be taken.

THIRDLY, To approve our selves as the Ministers of God, our Behaviour ought to be likewise with great Sobriety and Purity of Manners : For the great Purpose of God in revealing his Will, and employing his Ministers to publish it, being to reclaim Men from Vice and Wickedness, and to engage them to purify their Hearts and Lives, so as to become meet to be Partakers of an intellectual Happiness in Heaven ; this, I say, being the great Purpose of God in the
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Revelation of his Will, it cannot be suppos'd that his Wisdom should appoint any for the Publication of it, but such as should enforce it by Example as well as Doctrine ; especially since Example is oftentimes more powerful to reclaim Men to Virtue, than plain Evidence or strict Reasoning. And if so, *what manner of Persons ought we, more especially, to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness ?* such most certainly, as that others seeing the Beauty of Religion, in the Sobriety and Purity of our Lives, may be engag'd to the Esteem and Practice of it ; or at least, that all Occasions of Offence may be remov'd, so that our Doctrines may not suffer by any Prejudices to our Persons.

I MIGHT here add many other excellent Qualities, which are imply'd and must be suppos'd to center in this Character of the Minister of God : Indeed, to compleat it would require the particular mention of every Virtue ; *for the Man of God, to be perfect, must be thoro'ly furnish'd unto all good Works.* But having, I fear, sufficiently trespass'd on your Patience, I shall only beg leave to be particular in one thing more ; and that is,

LASTLY, That the Minister of God must be suppos'd to be a Person of very great and extensive Charity : This indeed, according to St. *Paul's* Notion of it, is not properly a single Virtue, but a Complication of Virtues ; it seems to imply an universal Benevolence, and Inclination to promote the Happiness of Mankind, and the actual Performance of such things as directly tend to it : and according to this comprehensive meaning of the Word, I may venture to say, 'tis the favourite Virtue of Christianity : The whole System of our Religion is founded upon it, and its most substantial Obligations fulfill'd in the Practice of it. For what is the wonderful Scheme of our Redemption by Jesus Christ, but an Instance of the greatest Charity (if I may so call it) that ever appear'd in the World ? And what are all those Obligations, which have an immediate respect to the Good and Happiness of Men, (which will include the most important Duties of our Religion) but so many Branches of this excellent Virtue ? 'Tis for this Reason St. *Paul* gives it the Preference to all other Virtues, and advises Christians *above all things to put on Charity*, as being *the Bond of Perfectness* ; as being that
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which compleats the Character of a truly good Man.

SINCE therefore the Dispensation of the Gospel is it self a Testimony of the most extensive Goodness, Benevolence and Mercy ; since the Purpose of God in this holy Institution, is to promote his Glory, by the Happiness of his Creatures ; it will certainly be expected from the Ministers of this Religion, that their Tempers and Dispositions should be conformable to this great and good Design ; that is, that an earnest Inclination, and sincere Endeavour to promote the Happiness of Men, should discover it self thro' all their Conduct ; or, which I take to be the same, that Charity should be the governing Principle of their Lives.

AND this, I apprehend, were it observ'd in our Practice, would cut off innumerable Occasions of Offence, that usually arise from the want of it : for 'twill enlarge our Minds, and rectify our Wills ; 'twill remove our Prejudices, and temperate our Zeal, so that we shall not be apt to lay greater Stress upon things than they really deserve ; 'twill direct us to have always a serious Regard to the great Ends of Religion, so as never to overlook

overlook them in pursuit of the Means ; 'twill incline us to make those Allowances to others, which we desire our selves, and prevent our endeavouring to make our own Judgment the Measure and Standard of other Mens : 'twill engage us to the Exercise of Love, Meekness, Patience, and Forbearance ; and oblige us to the Performance of those Duties, which the Wants and Infirmities of Men require from us ; and particularly as Ministers of the Gospel, 'twill possess our Minds with a real Concern for the Salvation of Mens Souls, and consequently make us diligent in the Discharge of every Office, that has any Tendency to promote this great and important End. These, and such like Dispositions, are the genuine Fruits of this admirable Virtue : whence it appears, how necessary it is for the Ministers of the Gospel to excel therein ; so necessary it seems, according to St. *Paul's* Account, that the sublimest Eloquence, the most comprehensive Knowledge, the purest and strongest Faith, and the warmest Testimonies of Zeal, are of no value without it, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 1, 2, 3.

LET this then be our principal Care and Study, to approve our selves as the Ministers of God, by the constant Exercise

cise of universal Charity and Good-will; by this it will appear, that we are carrying on that Work of Goodness and Mercy, which was principally intended by the Revelation of the Gospel.

AND, finally, my Brethren! whatsoever things else are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good Report; if there be any thing accounted virtuous, if any thing praise-worthy; let us more especially think on, teach, and practise these things, that the Light of our Doctrine and Manners may so shine before Men, that they may account of us, as of the Ministers of God; and seeing our good Works, may be moved to the Imitation of them, and thereby glorify their Father which is in Heaven.

To whom, with the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.

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tion of that many Soul, which their
labours shall obtain.



To whom, with the Son, and the
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Glory forever, and for ever.
Amen.

FINIS

